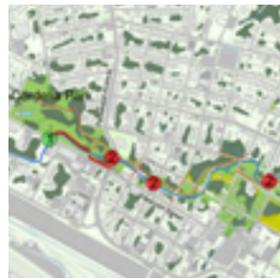


Little Sugar Creek GREENWAY MASTER PLAN



A tool for development for a 15-mile trail system along Little Sugar Creek



Little Sugar Creek GREENWAY MASTER PLAN

Mecklenburg County
Park and Recreation Department
5841 Brookshire Boulevard
Charlotte, North Carolina 28216
704.336.3854
www.parkandrec.com

Prepared by
LandDesign, Inc.

In association with
Design Studios West
HDR Engineering
HARP
Polk Communications

November 2003



Photos on front cover: Far left and far right photos by Nancy Pierce Shaver. Photos this page by Nancy Pierce Shaver.



"Sugar Creek begins flowing in North Charlotte and winds its way southward through the heart of the city. It passes big houses and shacks, fine homes and the homeless, finally spilling into the Catawba River after meandering some twenty-five miles through Mecklenburg County. No one pays it any attention. It's just there, a low-lying fixture of the landscape that's been around forever. But Sugar Creek is more than a ribbon of water. There are forces that have shaped its course and purpose. Among other things, it has served as a subtle border, separating black from white, rich from poor for generations. Slowly but surely, bridges have been built across it. Although the creek moves silently along, ignored and forgotten, it has passed a lot of lives on its endless journey and has many tales to tell,"

Billy Haake, from "Sugar Creek Stories," his recollection of a childhood along Little Sugar Creek.



TABLE of CONTENTS

1

Overview & Context

- 3 Introduction
- 4 History of Little Sugar Creek

2

Inventory and Analysis

- 12 Effective Agencies
- 12 Regional Context
- 13 Planning & Study Area
- 14 Environmental Issues
- 16 Land Use
- 22 Utilities
- 22 Transportation and Access

3

Programming and Public Involvement

- 23 Goals and Objectives
- 23 Community Direction
- 24 Community Benefits
- 25 Community Preferences
- 26 Precedents

4

The Greenway Master Plan

- 30 Reaches
- 31 Design Component Definitions
- 32 Cordelia Park to 10th Street
- 36 10th to Morehead
- 42 Morehead to Princeton
- 46 Princeton to Archdale
- 52 Archdale to I-485
- 56 I-485 to Polk Street
- 60 Polk Street to NC / SC Line

5

General Planning & Design Guidelines

- 64 Purpose
- 64 Overall Trail Guidelines
- 65 Clearing & Demolition
- 65 Grading, Earthwork & Drainage
- 66 Trail Improvements
- 70 Trail & Roadway Intersection Guidelines
- 73 Landscape Guidelines
- 76 Structures
- 78 Site Furnishings
- 80 Special Amenities
- 80 Managment
- 80 Environmental Best Management
- 81 Signage

6

Appendix

- 84 Plant Communities
- 85 Cost Estimate
- 88 Westfield Road Greenway Design
- 90 Road Crossings
- 116 Works Cited
- 117 Works Consulted



& OVERVIEW CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The Little Sugar Creek Greenway Master Plan represents the culmination of many hours of hard work between the public, Park and Recreation staff and committees, multiple agencies and departments, and government officials, all of whom share a vision for a creek that includes improved water quality, protected open space, transportation alternatives, green connectors, and leisure people places.

The water quality in Little Sugar Creek is currently unhealthy for human contact, and has the worst water quality of any creek in the state. This greenway aims to improve water quality by restoring the natural functions of the floodplain, with an emphasis on stream, wetland, and eventually wildlife restoration.

Little Sugar Creek is currently obscure, with little identity of its own. This proposed greenway aims to create people places, signature parks, and natural destinations, to add to the alternative transportation infrastructure of Mecklenburg County, and to generate economic development. Little Sugar Creek has the potential to offer a variety of activities for a variety of people, with experiences ranging from the oasis of an urban park, to the restorative nature of outdoor experiences, to the transportation and exercise of short or long bike rides, to the enjoyment of people with all physical abilities through ADA accessibility. Little Sugar Creek Greenway can help Mecklenburg County be a better place to live, work, and play while cultivating a thriving economy.

The Little Sugar Creek Greenway Master Plan is a comprehensive planning and design development tool that will ensure that this greenway represents pedestrian oriented infrastructure in an integrated system and guide for the work of land developers, design consultants, and Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation in such a way that development, though incremental, does not become fragmented. An ambitious goal for the greenway to be realized within 10 years requires close partnerships among government, businesses, civic organizations, developers, and individual citizens.

The Master Plan is intended for use by all of these bodies as a tool to design, build, and understand the vision for Little Sugar Creek Greenway. This document provides historical, physical, environmental and recreation context

for the greenway. It delineates “places” along the greenway, such as reaches and opportunity areas, and describes the proposed character of each place. It describes the elements, physical components, and character of the entire greenway, and makes general suggestions for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements to facilitate a successful project. Illustrations in the document, while not prescriptive, display the intended character of design elements, show how they relate to natural features and existing facilities, and demonstrate ways they can contribute to the character of the surrounding area.

Companion documents:

Executive Summary—An overview of the Master Plan projects and potential partnerships.

Master Plan Maps—Community Greenway Map, Neighborhood Connections Map, and Opportunity Areas Map
These individual maps are printed at a larger scale than in the Master Plan document. The individual maps also illustrate the greenway in its entirety, rather than by reaches as in the Master Plan document.

Design Guidelines—These are included in the master plan document, but could also be used separately.

LandDesign would like to thank their client, Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation for their input and leadership, especially Wayne Weston and Bridget Hanifin. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Creek Coordination Committee, Mecklenburg County Storm Water Service, Mecklenburg County Water Quality Program, the Little Sugar Creek Action Committee, and the Stewardship Advisory Council of the Park and Recreation Commission for their guidance and support.

Finally, LandDesign would like to thank their team members HARP, HDR, Polk Communications, and especially Don Brandes of Design Studios West, whose enthusiasm for designing unforgettable spaces will have left its mark on us as well as the Little Sugar Creek Greenway.

HISTORY OF LITTLE SUGAR CREEK

Sugaree Indians were early inhabitants of the Little Sugar Creek Watershed. Photo: Rozzelle.



James Knox Polk, the 11th US president's memorial homestead site, is located on the banks of Little Sugar Creek in Pineville.



Alexander Mill Ruin now stands on the grounds of Myers Park High School. This was a grist mill, which was ruined in the flood of 1898. Photo: Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Commission.



Women fishing in Little Sugar Creek, circa 1890. Photo: Rozzelle.



4

cultural history

Little Sugar Creek begins in Derita, travels through the historic neighborhoods in North Charlotte, and passes Charlotte's Uptown. It winds southward through neighborhoods and parks, joins Briar Creek, then reaches the North and South Carolina border. Finally, it joins Sugar Creek, which flows to the Catawba River and eventually into Lake Wateree in South Carolina. The area in which the creek is located is distinct from the coastal plain in that it is hilly with many rocky creeks and rivers. The nature of this geography has been the most important influence on the character of development and growth of Mecklenburg County. The next few pages give an overview of the history of Mecklenburg County in relation to Little Sugar Creek, from Native American settlements to the present day.

The history of Little Sugar Creek mirrors the urbanization of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Many of Mecklenburg County's origins, such as buildings, homes, and landmarks, have been erased, but its history is traceable through its creeks, roads, and remaining architecture. Little Sugar Creek Greenway offers a unique opportunity for years to come to explore Mecklenburg County's history in order to "recover memories of places so as to verify their grouped significance" (Willoughby).

Native Americans

The Sugaree Indians, a branch of the Catawba (which means "River People"), inhabited this area in 1650, after being forced out of Ohio by their enemies. This Catawba population of approximately 10,000 (Anderson) was the namesake for Little Sugar Creek and Sugar Creek. The meaning of Sugaree (a.k.a. Sugaw, Suga, Shugar, Suger) according to one source means "group of huts" (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Story), and to another "people of the river of water which is unfit to drink" (Rozzelle). On the other side of the Catawba River lived tribes of the Cherokee Nation, with whom the Sugaree did not co-exist peacefully. To protect themselves against the Cherokee,

the Catawba tribe joined forces with the settlers who were establishing farms and homes in this area. Despite these efforts, the Catawba population had dwindled to 1000 by 1759. They had claim to 15 square miles of land just below the North Carolina/South Carolina border in 1760, when they formed the Catawba Nation, but by 1840 only 600 acres of this land remained under their control (Anderson). Today there are approximately 1200 decedents of the Catawba living in the Rock Hill area.

This legacy of Native American settlement formed the basis for subsequent development in the Catawba River basin. Native Americans in the Central Piedmont traveled through the countryside along ridgelines between watersheds in order to avoid areas that were occasionally flooded. The main trail through the area was commonly called the Indian Trading Path, which ran along a ridgeline between the Irwin Creek and Little Sugar Creek watersheds (Anderson). This path was also referred to as the Catawba Trading Path and Path to the Cherokees.

First Settlers

The first white settlers in the area were Scotch-Irish. They traveled down the Indian Trading Path from Pennsylvania in search of land to settle and farm. This route became known as the Great Wagon Road, and was formed of rutted dirt, which made traveling by wagon difficult. The newcomers began to settle on the ridge between Little Sugar Creek and Irwin Creek at the intersection of the two Native American trading paths.

In the 1760s, Thomas Polk surveyed 100 acres in the area and established the beginning of the Charlotte street system in a grid based on the intersection of the two trading paths. These paths were given the new names of Trade and Tryon. The city's streets were laid out in approximate 400-foot blocks and did not follow the traditional system of north/south alignment. Thomas Polk married into the Spratt family. He and his family settled in the area now known as Pineville. In 1795, James Knox Polk was born on a 250-acre farm in the area. He later became the 11th US President.

Phifer Plantation: Brick home of wealthy planter W.F. Phifer, located at Phifer Avenue and North Tryon Street. This is where President Jefferson Davis conducted his last full cabinet meeting in 1865. (Hanchett: 1985). Photo from: Little Sugar Creek. Photo courtesy of the Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.



Rosedale Plantation built in 1815. Photo: Special Collections, UNC Charlotte.



Rosedale Plantation, which still stands at 3427 North Tryon Street. Photo: Special Collections, UNC Charlotte.



Early settlers kept small farms, hunted and fished, and traded with people traveling on the well-used route from Pennsylvania. Life was difficult for the early settlers, and it has been written that they kept a “barbaric” lifestyle, going half-naked, with unkempt property and persons. The recreated home site of James K. Polk depicts a much higher standard of living than was likely at the time.

At this time, the economy was based on corn, wheat, and two new products: gold and cotton. The discovery of gold in a nearby creek, named Little Meadow Creek, in 1799 spurred growth in what had been a rather small settlement until this time. The U.S. Mint opened in 1837 in Charlotte, as did a few small banks. “Gold fever” ended in 1849, when a much larger supply of gold was found in California. It was cotton that held a much stronger influence on Charlotte’s future (Hanchett, 1998).

Traveling by the rutted wagon roads to Charleston to trade crops was a long, hard journey for farmers in the Central Piedmont, who did not have the advantage the coastal plain farmers found in navigable creeks and rivers that could be used to reach the port city. Although the soil was fertile in this area, farmers could not afford to invest in one agricultural product; if prices fell, it became too costly to transport their goods to Charleston for trading. Therefore, farms in the back country of the Central Piedmont remained relatively small and diverse. By 1850 there were few “planters” (farmers who owned 20 slaves or more) in the region. Since the terrain kept farms small, most people involved in farming in Mecklenburg County owned fewer than 20 slaves, and had dual occupations to supplement their incomes. However, a large number of whites held slaves. In 1840, approximately 35 percent of the 1,065 people living in the region were held in slavery.

Due to the difficulty of transporting goods and the small size of the farms, many people traded their goods with storekeepers instead of transporting them to Charleston. Downtown land use was mixed, with large homes neighboring store fronts and trade shops. Stores were incorporated into houses, and in most cases the owners and

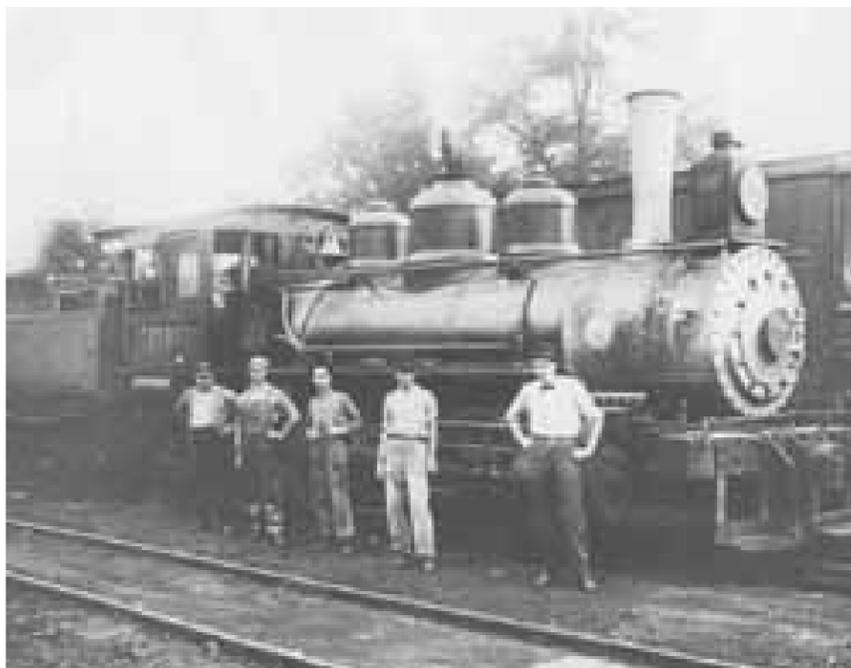
their small number of workers lived under one roof. Development was concentrated mainly on Trade and Tryon, probably because the streets were on high ground. With no storm or sewer system established, high ground meant an escape from flooding and the stench. As the city grew, more and more waste would be dumped into Little Sugar Creek and others.

With the arrival of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad from Charleston in 1852, the population and economy of Charlotte began to boom. Transporting cotton to Charleston became affordable, and farmers from across the region began to bring goods to Charlotte for transport. Three more railroads soon opened, spurring the construction of 12 new stores, 75 houses, and 5 additional banks (Hanchett, 1998).

The first railroad lay along the west side of downtown, along the banks of Little Sugar Creek. This area began to house cotton packaging industries and the shops that accompany a transportation hub, and began to be known as the “Wharf,” as it resembled Charleston’s port area. By 1860, the population of the region had quadrupled to 4,473 (Hanchett, 1998).

Soon the entrepreneurial spirit would take over Charlotte and send it from a cotton-transporting town to a cotton-manufacturing town. Charlotte’s first cotton mill, aptly named the Charlotte Cotton Mills, was set up in downtown Charlotte. The mill did not employ many workers, and the work force was easily supplied by downtown residents.

In 1889, D. A. Tompkins built the Alpha Mill, the first cotton mill to be located along Little Sugar Creek. The owners bought land along the railroads in North Charlotte, which was rural property at the time, and built and leased houses and tenements for their workers. It was the first class-segregated neighborhood built in the area, which broke the land use patterns of the day by developing outside of downtown. The streets were laid out in grids, based on the pattern of the downtown street grid (Hanchett, 1998).



(Far Left) The first train to arrive in Charlotte came in 1852, which spurred the development of cotton mills along Little Sugar Creek's path.



(Left) The Alpha Mill was the first of many cotton mills to be built near Little Sugar Creek. Photo: Morrill, 1997.



(Top) Alpha Mill Village- Mill developers built mill villages around the mills to house workers. These houses make up the Little Sugar Creek neighborhoods of Belmont, Optimist Park, and Villa Heights. Photo: Hanchett, 1985. (Above) A pair of lakes around Little Sugar Creek in North Charlotte housed a pumping station to serve the needs of downtown Charlotte (1905). Photo: Special Collections, UNC Charlotte.

This pattern continued in the North Charlotte area, with the construction of mills and mill villages to house workers. The next mill to be built in the area of Little Sugar Creek was the Highland Park Number One (a.k.a. the Gingham Mills) at Brevard and 12th Streets in 1892. Built on land bought from the Phifer Plantation under the leadership of Edward Dilworth Latta, Highland Park Number One included a weaving and spinning mill. The Louise Mill came next in 1897. It was built on a tributary of Little Sugar Creek between Louise Avenue and Hawthorne Lane on the Seaboard Railroad. For fire insurance purposes, a pond was created along the tributary. Highland Park Number Three was built in 1903. The developers bought land from the County that held the County Poorhouse's two beautiful lakes formed along Little Sugar Creek. At the site of the municipal lakes, the County government had built a pumping station to supply the city with water, but decided to sell the lakes and the land around them to increase development in the area. Part of the Highland Park Number Three development was also located on land bought from the Rosedale Plantation (Hanchett, 1985). Highland Park Number Three was the first steam-powered mill in the county. The creek also supplied power to adjacent mills that were built soon afterwards: the Johnston Mill and the Mecklenburg Mill (Hanchett, 1985).

1887 Thompson Orphanage

In 1887, on 21 acres of land along the banks of Little Sugar Creek just at the outskirts of uptown, which was then the city limits, Thompson Orphanage was established by St. Peter's Episcopal Church on the old site of St. Peter's School that failed after one year. 100 neglected or orphaned children found a home along the banks of Little Sugar Creek. Also on the site was a small brick manufacturing plant, where bricks were made from the clay along the banks of the creek. The orphanage's original school buildings and subsequent buildings were built with the bricks made from Little Sugar Creek's banks. The orphanage owned 40 acres, which housed their facilities, St. Mary's Chapel, a farm, and grazing land. The children played in the creek, and when the creek flooded, they played mud slinging games on the grounds. The orphanage was connected to the neighborhood of Brooklyn by a swinging bridge, which was crossed often by Brooklyn residents who worked at the orphanage. When Independence Boulevard was



Women swimming in the creek. Photo: Special Collections, UNC Charlotte.



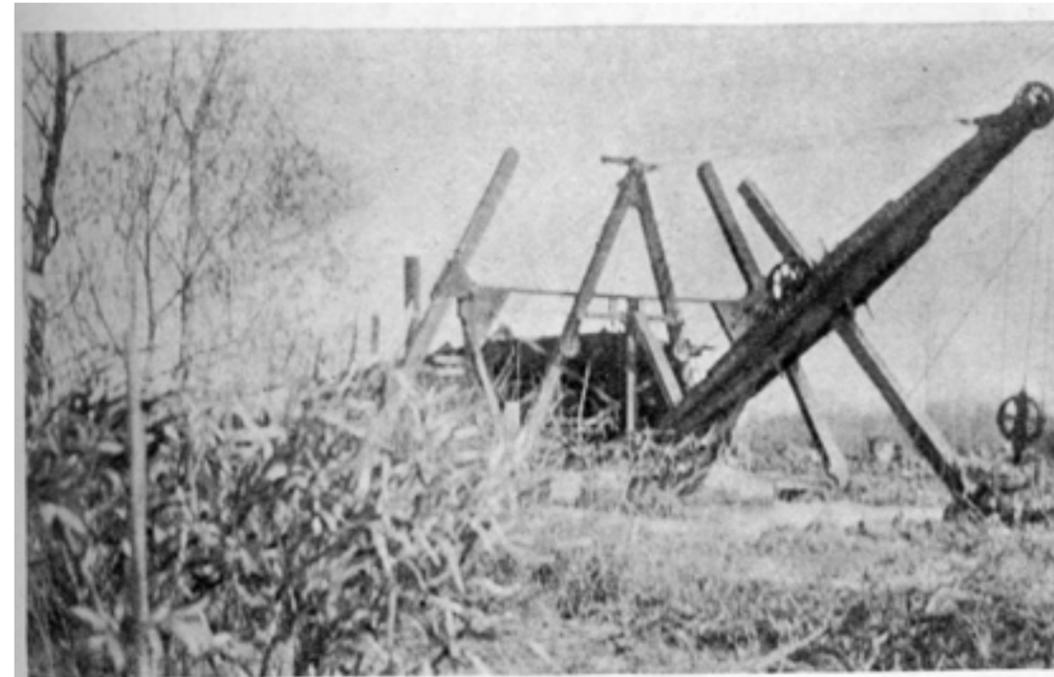
Bridge at Little Sugar Creek. Photo courtesy of the Carolina Room.



Little Sugar Creek. Photo courtesy of the Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.



Workers at the Highland Mills Number Three. Photo: CMHLC, Weaving History.



A. Dredge Boat at Work on Sugar Creek, Mecklenburg County.

Dredging of Little Sugar Creek took place in 1911. Photo: Pratt.

The town is built on a plateau, along the east and west sides of which sweep running streams, the ground sloping down to these from the center of town, giving a natural fall for sewerage lines. The flow of the streams into which is sufficient to carry it swiftly away. Four large mains empty into these streams, and there are miles of smaller mains connecting with them (1896 "Sketches of Charlotte" qtd. in Rozzelle.)

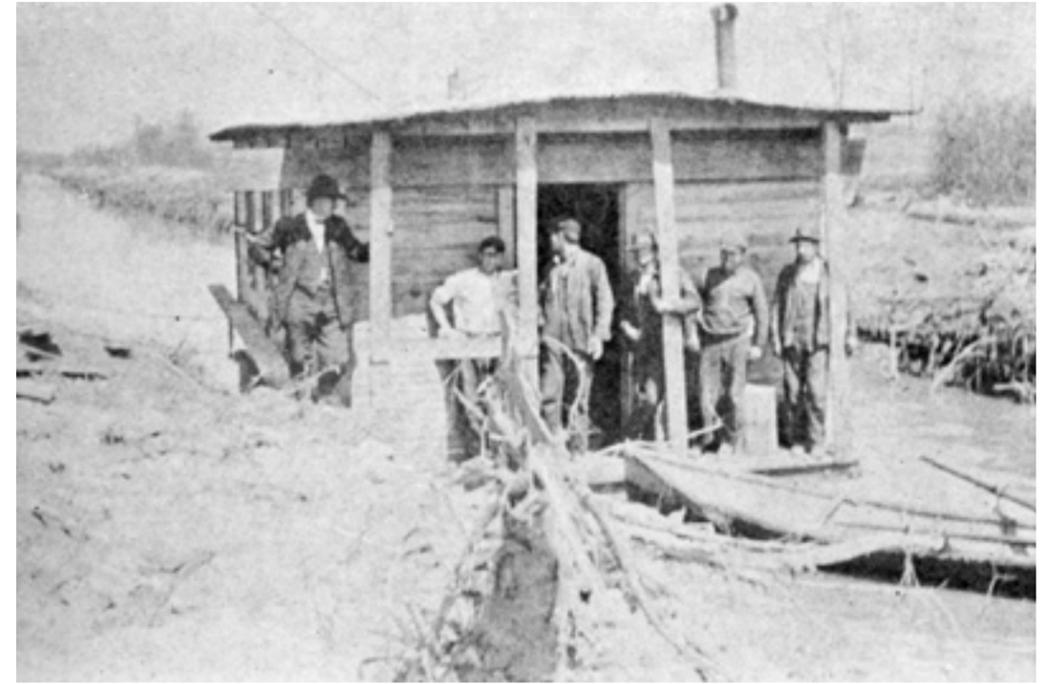
Children of Thompson Orphanage. The bricks of this building were made with clay from the banks of Little Sugar Creek. Photo courtesy of the Carolina Room.



St. Mary's Chapel was built for Thompson Orphanage from bricks made from the clay of Little Sugar Creek. It is the only building left standing from the Orphanage campus. (Photo: CMHLC, Cherry).



Houseboat on the recently dredged Little Sugar Creek, circa 1911. The creek was widened, deepened, and straightened to decrease flooding and to make more land available for farming. (Photo: Pratt).



8

widened to six lanes in 1951, the orphanage was moved. “The children used a culvert to reach the fields on the far side of Independence Boulevard, and the cows grazed unconcerned just a few yards from the passing traffic” (Lockman, 85).

First Neighborhoods

Little Sugar Creek defines the edges of many of Charlotte’s earliest neighborhoods: Elizabeth, Brooklyn, Cherry, Dilworth, and Myers Park, and the original mill villages of North Davidson, Optimist Park, Belmont, and Villa Heights. As Little Sugar Creek flows from uptown Charlotte, the growth of the city’s neighborhoods unfolds, revealing a history not unlike the rest of the nation’s: the decline of residential neighborhoods downtown with the advent of the automobile, the popularity of suburban living, and the demolition of the remaining downtown neighborhoods through “urban renewal.”

Cherry

Cherry Neighborhood (1891) was the first neighborhood built specifically for blacks moving out of the downtown neighborhood of Brooklyn, which had grown crowded with rental housing. The sanitary and storm sewer system consisted of open ditches. Cherry was built on the cotton farm owned by John and Mary Myers 20 years before the neighborhood of Myers Park developed. Cherry gave the option for Charlotte’s black residents to own their own homes. It had a park, a school, and churches (CMHLC, Cherry).

Elizabeth

This was the first “elite” suburb developed to the north of Cherry. Like Cherry, it was platted in the 1890s, but it did not see much housing construction until after streetcar tracks were laid up Elizabeth Avenue in 1903. This neighborhood had the first secondary school in the city, Central High, which is now a part of Central Piedmont Community College. Independence Park, which originally included a lake, was the first public park in Charlotte. It was designed by John Nolan and built by D. A. Tompkins in 1905 (CMHLC, Independence Park).

Dilworth

The Dilworth neighborhood was developed in the 1890s by Edward Dilworth Latta as a suburb for a growing industrial workforce. When an electric streetcar system was established to connect the suburb to downtown, development took off and the suburb became popular.

Myers Park

The suburb of Myers Park was developed by landscape architect John Nolen on the farmland of John and Mary Myer, just south of the Cherry neighborhood. The development breaks the traditional pattern of streets laid in a grid system by incorporating winding streets and plans for greenways along the streams that traverse and bound the suburb. By the 1920s, Myers Park was the most prestigious address in Charlotte.

Growth Impacts

As Charlotte grew, new development occurred within the floodplain of Little Sugar Creek. In 1911, due to flooding problems and the desire to obtain more farmland, Little Sugar Creek was dredged to create a canal that was 20 to 30 feet wide and 8 to 11 feet deep. This dredging program was part of a larger project that resulted in a straightened, deepened, widened channel, with a large amount of removed rock and more than 20 thousand acres of land “reclaimed” along two creeks and their tributaries, one being Little Sugar Creek (Pratt).

Little Sugar Creek began to be seen as a stinky, dirty nuisance due to sewage dumping, storm runoff, and the upset of the natural balance. Perfumed barrels were suspended over the sides of bridges to cover the stench. In 1946, Independence Boulevard was opened and then widened in 1951, which entailed piping the creek. In 1959 the first indoor mall in the Southeast, Charlottetown Mall, opened and covered another block of Little Sugar Creek. As the creek continued to be channelized and covered, its health deteriorated and damage caused by flooding increased.



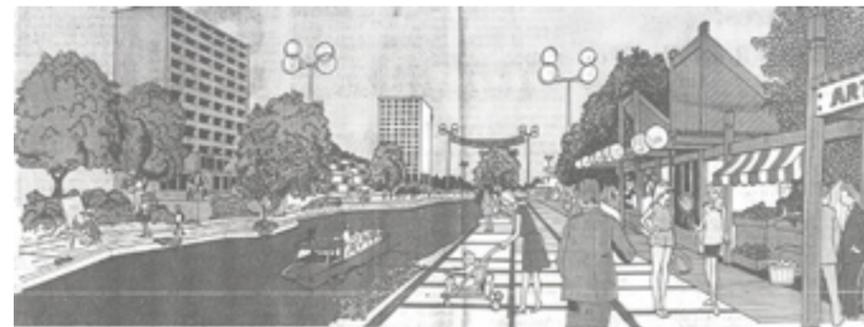
1. Ruth and John Kilgo sitting in Independence Park. Photo courtesy of Charles Paty, via the Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library.
 2. Barrels filled with perfume were suspended from bridges to disguise the creek's stench.
 3. Charlottetown Mall, the first indoor mall in the Southeast, was built on top of Little Sugar Creek.
 4. House in Cherry (Photo: CMHLC).
 5. Mt. Zion Lutheran Church in Cherry, circa 1896 (Photo: CMHLC).



A collection of newspaper headlines voicing concern over the health of Little Sugar Creek (Rozzelle).

Charlotte's Greenway Movement

In the 1960s and 70s, the idea of creating a destination spot along the banks of Little Sugar Creek developed based on city officials' visit to San Antonio's River Walk. Plans were made to develop an urban edge along the creek with outdoor dining, creekside cafes, and river boats as an added attraction. Little Sugar Creek was to be dammed and widened to create a 2.5-mile waterfront presence from Fourth Street to Freedom Park (Pratt, 24). The project was long debated and never built.



Sugar Creek Could Become A Place Of Tranquility, Beauty, And Even Excitement For The People Of Charlotte
SUGAR CREEK: Is There Hidden In The Murk A Stream For Dreaming

This newspaper clipping is referring to the first plans for the Little Sugar Creek Greenway, the Projection 70 Plan. The illustration was by the firm of Crutcher Ross (Jetton).

timeline

- 1911 John Nolen's Master Plan for Myers Park calls for greenways along Little Sugar Creek
- 1940 Urban streams are very polluted, with odors and no aquatic life (Rozzelle)
- 1950 Creeks are deodorized
- 1959 Sewage and Waste Disposal Ordinance adopted
- 1966 In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Master Plan for Recreation, the Charles M. Graves Organization recommends greenways as a means of ordering open space in the county.
- 1969 Mecklenburg County Water Quality Program approved
- 1968 Charlotte Downtown Development Association visits San Antonio's Riverwalk and is inspired to create a similar mixed-use water front atmosphere along Little Sugar Creek. This endeavor is supported by Jerry Tuttle and others (Charlotte Magazine, Sept/Oct. 1971). After much debate, the project is not financially backed, and around 1974 becomes a flood control project.
- 1972 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Commission is formed.
- 1972 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utility Department formed.
- 1972 Federal Clean Water Act adopted.
- 1974 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Commission appoints a greenway committee, and begins acquiring land for open space preservation. The committee recommends 20 creeks to make up a possible greenway network.
- 1975 The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission shows their support for greenway development by listing the benefits of a greenway system for Mecklenburg County.
- 1978 A Parks Bond allocating \$19.7 million to parks over the following seven years is passed. \$4 million of this is slated for land acquisition for greenway development.
- 1979 Lower McAlpine Greenway is completed as a pilot project.
- 1980 The Greenway Site Selection Committee is appointed to determine the best use of the \$4 million and to study the feasibility of greenway development. The committee produces the 1980 Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation Master Plan, which calls for 73.7 miles of green space.
- 1989 Water Supply Ordinances adopted.
- 1993 Charlotte issued a permit by the State requiring the control of pollutants generated by stormwater runoff.
- 1995 100-year flood in Mecklenburg County.
- 1995 City and County Park and Recreation departments merge.
- 1996 Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners unanimously adopts the County's first Creek Use Policy Statement.
- 1997 100-year flood in Mecklenburg County.
- 1997 Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners adopts the Mecklenburg County Floodplain Management Guidance Document to "preserve and restore the natural and beneficial functions of the floodplain."
- 1998-2000 "Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities curbed sewage spills and replaced leaking pipes, resulting in a 73 percent drop in the creek's bacterial level from 1998 to 2000." (Creative Loafing The Little Creek That Could)
- 1998 Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners (BOCC) unanimously adopts the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) strategy that seeks to achieve "swimmable" waters in all creeks and streams in the county.
- 1999 Greenways Master Plan is produced, calling for 214.6 miles of green space. 29.9 miles of greenways are in existence. Plan also calls for Little Sugar Creek Greenway to be developed as a pilot project.
- 1999 BOCC commits to utilize state, federal, storm water and open space bond funds for the acquisition of floodplain property.
- 2000 SWIM Buffer ordinance is instituted.
- 2001 Little Sugar Creek Planning Workshops occur.
- 2001 City, county and towns adopt new floodplain maps based on ultimate development in the watershed- the only community to do this in U.S.
- 2002 Little Sugar Creek Master Plan is undertaken. The LandDesign Team begins preparing a Master Plan for a 15-mile greenway along Little Sugar Creek, from Cordelia Park to the North Carolina / South Carolina line.

prior planning, design and flood prevention efforts

Since 1988, a transition has been in progress in Charlotte-Mecklenburg that set the stage for and facilitated the launch of the Little Sugar Creek Master Plan. In that year, the Mecklenburg County Department of Environmental Protection initiated and led the first serious discussions of watershed protection in the community. In water supply watershed protection, the last of four ordinances that establish regulations controlling development within the contributory drainage basins of Lakes Norman, Mountain Island, and Wylie have recently been adopted. In stream protection, the fruits of the 1996 resolution by the Board of County Commissioners that led to creation of the SWIM program are now being harvested. In stormwater management, Charlotte Mecklenburg now has one of the most advanced stormwater management programs in this region via Charlotte Mecklenburg Stormwater Services and the Stormwater Utility created to provide a funding mechanism for this work. In open space planning, the Park and Recreation Department commissioned and ultimately approved a new Greenway Master Plan to provide a road map for acquisition and implementation of a county-wide greenway plan in 1999.

Left photo: Flooding at Midtown Sundries in 1997 (Photo courtesy of Andrew Burg). Newspaper article right: Multi-agencies, elected officials, and public interest groups have worked together to support and facilitate the improvement of water quality and a greenway along Little Sugar Creek (Charlotte Observer.)



Today Little Sugar Creek is cleaner than it has been in 50 years...
Rusty Rozzelle, LUESA-WQD

current conditions



“Establish a comprehensive greenway along Little Sugar Creek that connects people and neighborhoods in a cultural, historical, social, environmental, educational, recreation, and wellness manner,”

Vision statement from the Little Sugar Creek Action Committee in 2001.

In 2000, political and business leaders from the city embarked on a cross-country tour of exemplary urban models. Some of the cities they visited were San Antonio, Pueblo, and Denver Colorado, which rekindled excitement about a greenway along Little Sugar Creek. An action committee was formed as an ad hoc committee to find out how the rest of the community felt about the creation of a greenway, and whether citizens would respond well to the idea of funding this natural amenity.

In the summer of 2001, a series of five community forums were held to test the community’s responsiveness. Attendees discussed the opportunities and constraints of developing a greenway, based on financial, recreation, neighborhood, environmental, and educational aspects. The idea of a greenway along Little Sugar Creek was well-received by the public, and the Little Sugar Creek Action Committee held a celebration to announce the public support and feedback. Four committees were formed to oversee the development of a comprehensive strategic plan: Planning and Design, Funding and Financing, Implementation, and Communication.

The Little Sugar Creek Steering Committee was also established to give the public a voice in the greenway development. This committee meets twice a year to give input on the process and to guide the project.



CHRISTOPHER A. RECORD - STAFF PHOTO

Little Sugar Creek loses its top

Officials held a ceremony Friday for the uncapping of Little Sugar Creek, a step in the development of a 12.5-mile greenway along the Charlotte waterway. Several hundred yards of the creek near uptown were covered with concrete and asphalt for parking when Charlottetown Manor assisted living center, a former Ramada Inn, was built in 1968. It's all coming off now and getting replaced by the greenway, which will run from Cordelia Park north of uptown to the S.C. line.

Article in the Charlotte Observer about the uncapping of Little Sugar Creek in September 2002.